

## ***Veterans Day Update***

U.S Congressman Harry Mitchell is Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations and represents more than 65,000 veterans. Mitchell understands the importance of providing our veterans with the benefits they deserve.

*"The men and women of the armed forces have been made a promise that if they defend our country in military service, we will provide them with the benefits they have earned."*

-Congressman Harry Mitchell

Below is an update on the work Congressman Mitchell is doing on the behalf of veterans in Arizona and across the nation:

## **President Obama Thanks Congressman Mitchell for Leadership on Veterans Issues**

### **August 17, 2009**

"We will fulfill our responsibility to our veterans as they return to civilian life. I was proud to co-sponsor the Post-9/11 GI Bill as a senator. Thanks to VFW members across the country-and leaders like Arizona's Harry Mitchell in Congress-it's now the law of the land. And as President, I'm committed to seeing that it is successfully implemented."

-President Barack Obama, [Remarks to National VFW Convention](#) , Phoenix, Arizona,

### **August 3, 2009**

President Barack Obama today gave a shoutout to Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Ariz., for his work on the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill, which went into effect Saturday. Obama was speaking at a G.I. Bill event at George Mason University in the Washington, DC, suburb of Fairfax, Va.

Obama mentioned Mitchell as one of the original bill sponsors who couldn't attend the event.

"All of them worked hard along with the delegation that is present, so we are very grateful to all

of them," Obama said.

- [Arizona Republic](#)

### **Mitchell Earns American Legion 'Distinguished Legislator' Award**

The American Legion Department of Arizona presented Mitchell with its Distinguished Legislator Award for his work on behalf of our nation's veterans. Mitchell accepted the award in Glendale on Saturday, June 18 2009 and addressed the organization at its annual convention.

"I am honored to be recognized by the American Legion and proud of the work we have done on behalf of veterans in Arizona and across the nation. Our veterans have stood for us and it is our duty to stand for them." Mitchell said.

### **Veterans Funding Update**

This year's veteran's budget has increased the investment in veterans' health care and services by 60 percent since January 2007, including the largest single increase in the 78-year

history of the VA.

This funding has strengthened health care for more than 5 million veterans, resulting in the addition of 17,000 new doctors and nurses, and more Community-Based Outpatient Clinics and new Vet Centers. It has been critical to meeting the needs of the 363,000 veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan in need of care over the last three years. This funding also is expanding mental health screening and treatment -- vital to the many veterans suffering from PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury.

Congress has recently enacted a law that paves the way for ensuring sufficient, timely and predictable funding for veterans' health care, a key priority of many veterans' groups. This law authorizes Congress to approve VA medical care appropriations one year in advance of the start of each fiscal year.

In 2007, Congress enacted the Wounded Warriors Assistance Act, which addressed the problems and gaps in care at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and other military health care facilities. VA and the Defense Department are implementing electronic health records to give service members a single, accurate, paperless health record to smooth the transition from the Armed Forces to the VA system.

**Rep. Mitchell Helps Secure Passage of Major Veterans Legislation**

**[Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009 -H.R. 1016](#)**

On Thursday, October 22, 2009, President Obama signed into law H.R. 1016, which Congressman proudly cosponsored. The new law authorizes Congress to approve Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical care appropriations one year in advance of the start of each fiscal year. An advance appropriation provides VA with up to one year in which to plan how to deliver the most efficient and effective care to an increasing number of veterans with increasingly complex medical conditions.

### **[Service Members Homeownership Tax Act - H.R. 3590](#)**

Congressman Mitchell supported this bill which, along with stabilizing out nations housing industry, ensures our honorable service men and women can take full advantage of the first-time homebuyer tax credit. Current law requires first-time homebuyers who use the \$8,000 tax credit to repay the credit if they move from their principal residence within three years of closing. The Service Members Home Ownership Tax Act of 2009, if enacted, would exclude service members from the repayment of the tax credit if their orders require travel. The bill passed by a vote of 416-0, and is now pending before Senate.

### **[Military Spouses Residency Relief Act - H.R. 1182/S.475](#)** .

The Service Members Spouses Residency Relief Act allows service members to maintain their residency for certain purposes - such as voting, income taxes, and personal property taxes - in a state from which they are absent in compliance with military orders. The House approved this measure on November 2, 2009 and it is now pending before the Senate.

### **[Veterans Retraining Act of 2009- H.R. 1168](#)**

This bill authorizes the Labor Department to pay a monthly training assistance allowance of upwards of \$1,400 for each month, up to 6 months every 10 years, which a veteran is enrolled in an employment-training program that teaches a skill in demand. It also provides a moving stipend of up to \$5,000 for moving expenses directly related to training. The bill passed by a vote of 356-0 and it is now pending before the Senate.

### **[FY 2010 Military Construction/VA Appropriations - H.R. 3082](#)**

The FY 2010 VA Appropriations bill contained the largest veterans funding increase ever requested by a President. The House approved a bill that provides a path to restoring and revitalizing the services provided to veterans by adding \$14.5 billion above fiscal year 2009. In addition to appropriations for fiscal year 2010, it includes advance appropriations for 2011. Congress has provided \$17.7 billion over the last two years, and once enacted, H.R. 3082 will amount to a 58% increase since 2007. The bill passed by a vote of 415-3, and is now pending before Senate.

### **[The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act - H.R. 1](#)**

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was honored our veterans by provided a \$1.4 billion increase for the Department of Veterans Affairs for maintenance at VA medical facilities, construction of veterans' extended care facilities, and veteran cemetery repairs. It provided an economic stimulus payment of \$250 to disabled veterans receiving VA compensation or pension. The bill passed the House and was signed into law by the President in February.

## **Keeping the Promises Made to Veterans**

**Electronic Medical Records:** The House Veterans Affairs Committee is continuing to monitor the progress being made to ensure an interoperable electronic health record system between the DOD and the VA. President Obama ordered the agencies to work together to define and build a Joint Virtual Lifetime Electronic record that will ultimately contain administrative and medical information from the day an individual enters military service throughout their military career, and into the veteran phase of life.

**New Diseases Associated with Agent Orange:** An independent study by the Institute of Medicine indicates an association with several diseases linked to exposure to Agent Orange. VA Secretary Shinseki has announced that Vietnam Veterans with B cell leukemia's, such as hairy cell leukemia; Parkinson's disease; and ischemic heart disease with these diseases may be eligible for [disability compensation](#) and [health care benefits](#)

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## **Ensuring Veterans receive their GI Bill Benefits:**

The G.I Bill was introduced by U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell in the House of Representatives and Sen. Jim Webb (D-Va.) in the Senate to provide veterans with enhanced new education benefits beginning this fall.

On August 1, 2009, veterans started receiving college education benefits under the new Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. When news broke about delays of GI Bill benefits for veterans, Mitchell demanded accountability from the Department of Veterans Affairs at a Congressional hearing, as well as a plan to ensure veterans receive their benefits in a timely manner. No veteran should have their education delayed. Not by one semester.

Advance payments on late claims are being issued by U. S. Treasury within 3 workdays following submission of this request.

**For further information call** 1-888-GI-BILL-1 (1-888-442-4551) to speak with a Veterans Benefits Counselor. You can also visit the [VA's GI Bill website](#) .

## **DOD Announces Retroactive Stop Loss Special Pay**

The Defense Department announced plans to provide Retroactive Stop Loss Special Pay to service members who had their enlistment extended or retirement suspended due to Stop Loss between Sept. 11, 2001 and Sept. 30, 2009.

Eligible personnel will receive a payment of \$500 per month for each month that the member was retained on active duty due to Stop Loss.

For additional information:

**Army:** <https://www.stoplosspay.army.mil>

**Navy:** send email to - [NXAG\\_N132C@navy.mil](mailto:NXAG_N132C@navy.mil)

**Marine Corps:** <https://www.manpower.usmc.mil/stoploss>

**Air Force:** <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/stoploss>

## **VA Oversight: Solutions and Accountability for Veterans**

Mitchell's Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations provides oversight on programs and operations of the Department of Veterans Affairs, as well as those of other federal agencies that pertain to veterans. In carrying out its responsibilities, the Subcommittee conducts hearings, site visits, and investigations nationwide. Chairman Mitchell has held a series of oversight hearings to measure program results, end waste, and provide accountability for the American taxpayer.

### **Recent Oversight and Investigations Hearings:**

Oversight Hearing - "Senior Executive Service Bonuses and Other Administrative Issues at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs"

[Chairman Mitchell's opening statement](#)

[Webcast of hearing](#)

Oversight Hearing - "The Implications of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Limited Scope of Gulf War Illness Research"

[Chairman Mitchell's opening statement](#)



[Webcast of the hearing](#)